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Masters Golf Tournament

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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On Sunday, as I usually do on Master's weekend, I turned to CBS to get an overdose of saccharine. Jim Nantz was in fine form developing storylines, both real and contrived, to keep the focus on the players and the natural beauty of Augusta National. The camera guys had all the obligatory shots of the dogwoods and redbud trees, the flaming and cooling azaleas, and to complete the scene, an occasional magnolia. Words like "idyllic" were used with abandon and those close ups of tense competitors nearly made golf look like an action sport.

On the leader board, which in golf means the scoreboard, were the names of Bubba Watson, Jordan Spieth, Matt Kuchar, Jonas Blixt, and any number of others. Shortly into the afternoon the final twosome of Watson and Spieth became the focal point of the coverage.

The storylines rolled off Nantz's tongue. Watson at age 35 is the creative player who might do anything, and did. He is described by golf writers as an Everyman. He is from Bagdad, Florida, and his favorite hang out is Waffle House. If you have never been to the South, it is nearly impossible to describe this 24 hour breakfast place that gives comfort to truckers and travelers on the highways, byways, and street corners in Dixie. It is a place where "Bubbas" congregate.

As for Jordan Spieth, who was tied with Watson going into the final round, he is 20 and the great young hope of Golf's aging fandom. Over and over again Jim Nantz told us Jordan's age and pointed out that it was Spieth's first Masters. Could a rookie wear the green jacket? Could this "fine young man" become the youngest Masters champion ever? His former college buddies were there as his guests to cheer him on.

It was at this point that Jim Nance got my attention. Jordan Spieth was a twenty year old who left college at nineteen to become a professional golfer. Say it isn't so, Jordan, or Jim, or someone.

Who let him do this? Doesn't he know he needs to get a college education? Is this some new version of "one and done?" I was initially shocked and then dismayed to hear

about this misguided former teenager who made such a foolish decision. What happens if he doesn't make it on the fairways? Does he have a backup plan?

What's more amazing is that Jim Nance never mentioned this facet of Jordan Spieth's bio. Wasn't it just a week ago that Nantz and his colleagues talked about the issue of "one and done," how important it was for kids to stay in school, how young boys should not be pushed into a world of mature men wandering from city to city?

It was made perfectly clear that CBS stands for education over sport, that the student is more important than the athlete, and that the future of America is at stake on this issue. How many times did the president of the NCAA make this point throughout March Madness?

Mark Emmert said that he "enormously" dislikes the "one and done" phenomenon and that he believes in the concept of the student athlete. Emmert was all over the media letting it be known that his views were not changing and he would not support anything as crass as a union. Student athletes, argued the NCAA at the NLRB hearings, are not employees of the university, they are students.

Meanwhile the new NBA President, Adam Silver, is pumping the idea that the NBA age minimum should be raised to 20. "Two and through?" Presumably Mr. Silver understands the issues at stake and wants to protect young boys from the predatory life of the NBA. "It is my belief that if players have an opportunity to mature as players and as people, for a longer amount of time, before they come into the league, it will lead to a better league," said Silver. Apparently Silver thinks of the university as a "maturing oven" for the youth of America.

Did you hear that Jordan Spieth?

No, not a soul mentioned that Jordan Spieth was too young to be on the golf tour. Not once did Nance mention that Spieth should have stayed at the University of Texas. Apparently Jim Nantz didn't know that Spieth was a "one and a half and done," leaving in the middle of his second year. He certainly knew Spieth's age which he mentioned over and over again as "this fine young man" took over the lead on the front nine on Sunday.

Then when Jordan's game tightened under the pressure and he lost his lead, the storyline changed. Spieth was now someone too young, not yet ready, not tested enough under pressure. However he was not someone who should have stayed in college and matured and maybe even got an education before joining the tour.

Should Jordan Spieth have stayed off the tour and played intercollegiate golf to sharpen his game? Spieth took home nearly \$800,000 for his effort this weekend. Last year when he should have been in college he earned \$2.6M on the tour. Wouldn't he have been better off taking all that scholarship money and staying in school? What is his backup plan anyway?

If you think the answers to these questions are obvious, then you should support anyone who has the ability to become a professional athlete regardless of age?

But depending on your sport you may have to wait to become a professional until you are 19, until you finish two years of college, or three years of college. That represents one to three years of career earning power and a loss of individual freedom, as well as a gain for those who would rather make that money for themselves.

Jim Nantz didn't mention a word of this to America.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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